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ABSTRACT

The issues and difficulties of providing equal educational opportunity in a widely multicultural country, such as Canada, are addressed. The French-English conflict is considered only as a highly visible indication of a more profound social dilemma. Several educational programs intended to meet the language and social needs of immigrant children are discussed, and a case is made for multicultural education as an important instrument in implementing a national cultural tolerance. (IH)

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Contemporary Canadian Policies and Practices in the Education of Immigrant Children[1]

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Most of you are no doubt aware of the fact that Canada is a country with many French-speaking citizens, and that many of them live in the Province of Quebec. I am sure you are also aware that some Quebecois are very dissatisfied with the present federal structure of the confederation and that during the last provincial election the Province of Quebec elected a Parti Quebecois government which is committed to taking Quebec out of Canada thus plunging our nation into its most serious political crisis since its birth in 1867.

Because of this preoccupation with French-English relations the extent of Canada's ethnic diversity as a nation is often forgotten. Almost a quarter of Canada's population has an origin which is neither British nor French. As Lapul has recently reported "The 1,317,200 German Canadians for example, are more numerous than the total population of any one of Saskatchewan (926,245) Manitoba (988,250) Nova Scotia (788,960) New Brunswick (674,455) Newfoundland (522,100) or Prince Edward Island (111,640) - six of Canada's ten provinces. There are more Ukranians in Canada (580,660) than individuals of all origins in Newfoundland, and Italian-Canadians (730,520) are almost as numerous as the entire population of Nova Scotia". About a million Canadians have origins which has earned them the dubious title of "visible minorities" - i.e. Native Indians, Eskimoes, Chinese, Japanese, East Indians, West Indians, Blacks, Arabs, Latin Americans and so on. No one ethnic group forms a majority in Canada. It is a land of minorities. It is also a nation of immigrants. The source of immigrants has changed over the years and with it the ethnic composition of Canadian society. First came the French and then the British

and then the central and southern Europeans, Chinese and Japanese. In 1967 the Government of Canada issued immigration regulations which, for the first time spelled out the principles governing the selection of immigrants to Canada. The regulations were to apply universally without reference to race or country of origin. A changed pattern of immigration resulted. Before 1967 the major source of immigrants were the U.S. and Europe with a small number from Asia and the West Indies. After 1967 immigration from Northern Europe decreased and that from Southern Europe, Asia, Africa and the West Indies increased substantially. A recent study by Richmond (1975) states that 26.5% of all immigrants between 1967 and 1974 were blacks or Asian and by 1974 the non-white population was approximately 404,000 or 1.8% of the total Canadian population. Thus at the present time Canada has approximately, 10 million British-Canadians, 6 million French Canadians and 6 million belong to that bothersome category "other". Even this does not give a true picture of the Canadian demographic scene. The three big cities - Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver absorb an overwhelming proportion of new immigrants to Canada, resulting in a large concentration of immigrants in these metropolitan areas. The 1971 census figures, our last officials census, show that in Toronto for example, close to half of the household heads were born outside Canada, another 1/5th had at least one foreign-born parent and only 29% were born in Canada and had both foreign-born parents. Figures published by Toronto Board of Education show that as of September 1976 more than 50% of the 95,000 students served by the Board did not claim English as their mother-tongue. A little over 10% students reported Italian as their mother-tongue, about 5.6% reported

Portugese, 6.1% Chinese and another 14.1% some other language. About 30% of the students were born outside Canada. Of these over 5,000 were born in Portugal, over 3,000 in Italy, over 2,500 in China or Hong Kong, over 4,900 in the Caribbean, over 2,000 in Greece, over 4,000 in other European countries, over 2,000 in parts of Asia and Middle East and over 1,100 in parts of Central or South America.

How does this concentration of immigrant children affect their education? Does it enhance or retard their academic performance, social integration, linguistic adjustment, self-concept? How does it affect the local Canadian children? Should we employ the policy of dispersal practiced in some other countries? Unfortunately, research on these questions is almost non-existent in Canada.

What has been the attitude of the Canadian population towards immigration and immigrants. Reading the historical accounts it becomes obvious that the successive group of immigrants had to face prejudice and experience discrimination. Here is what one superintendent of a school board in Toronto had to say about immigrants and education for immigrants

> "Many of these immigrants will doubtless add both to the intelligence and productive industry of the country. But is this the character of most of them? From their former wretched circumstances and still more wretched habits, they are notoriously as destitute of intelligence and industry, as they are of means of subsistence. The physical disease and death which has accompanied their influx among us may be precursors of worse pestilence of social insubordination and disorder. It is therefore of the last importance that every possible effort should be employed to bring the facilities of Education within the reach of the families of these unfortunate people, that they may grow up in the industry and intelligence of the country, and not in the idleness and pamperism, not to say mendicity and vices of their forefathers".

The chief Superintendent was not speaking about the blacks or Asians but about Irish immigrants to Canada in the middle of the last century. Immigrants from places like Russia, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, and Portugal or as they were popularly known as "the stalwart peasant in the sheepskin coat" were next to inherit the legacy, which, in the modern times seems to have been passed on to the visible minorities i.e. the Asians and the blacks.

What is the behaviour pattern expected from an immigrant before he will be accepted as a full-fledged member of Canadian society? These expectations seem to have undergone a change over time. Until about the early 60s Canada was openly and unabashedly British. Assimilation into the Canadian version of British culture was the only hope offered to immigrants. And then came the turbulent sixties, a dozen years of upheavel in North America. In the United States there were campus riots, the destruction of black ghettos, the opting out of young people, the drugs, the rock music scene, the emergence of black power. In Canada things were less volatile and the change subtle but just as, if not more, far reaching. The Province of Quebec underwent what has come to be known as the "quiet revolution". French Canadians no longer satisfied with a subservient role demanded, and to a certain extent obtained, a bigger role in business, government and industry. A "third" force emerged in Canada. People whose background was neither English nor French demanded recognition of their cultural heritage and their place in the Canadian mosaic, and the medium they chose was the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The B.& B. Commission, among others, published a volume on "The Cultural Contribution of other Ethnic Groups". This created a great deal of discussion across the nation and led to the adoption of the current

national policy of Multiculturalism in a bilingual framework. Under this policy Canada has "two official languages but no official culture". The official policy recognizes that Canada consists of immigrants form all parts of the globe and that the Canadian cultural mosaic contains many cultures, each making its own unique contribution. No ethnic group, including the British and the French ethnic groups, takes precedence over another. The policy is based on the assumption that in order to have respect of other cultures the individual must have confidence in his own cultural foundations, and that all cultural groups are essential to our society and should, therefore, be retained. It is, in short, a policy of cultural democracy as against a policy of cultural imperialism.

Acceptance of the policy of multiculuralism implies certain objectives for education of immigrants. Thus an immigrant child must

a) become fluent in at least one of Canada's two official languages viz English and French, in order to participate effectively in a Canadian context.

b) be encouraged to retain his own language and culture and develop a sense of pride in his own cultural heritage.

c) be encouraged to feel that he does not have to be like an Anglo-Saxon in order to climb the social ladder.

What has been done to meet these objectives?

Learning of English/French as a second language: When an immigrant child comes to Canada learning of a Canadian language is his most obvious need, and this has received a great deal of attention. Mary Ashworth who has done a survey of English language classes for immigrant children classifies the great

variety of these programs into five categories.

1. Reception classes. A reception class is made up entirely of non-English speaking immigrant children. They spend most of their day with their New Canadian teacher but may be integrated with other children for subjects such as Physical Education, art, music and home economics. Children concentrate on learning English without any interruptions or diversions. However, care must be taken to see that new Canadian children have social interaction with other children, otherwise the reception class can become an immigrant ghetto.

2. Half day classes. Under this arrangement the child spends half the day in the New Canadian class learning English and the other half of the day in a regular class with children of his own age. Elementary schools with their flexible time-tables and open approach seem to find half-day classes quite acceptable, as they seem to give the child the best of both worlds, intensive language training along with opportunities for social interaction with other children. Secondary schools with modular or rotating time-tables are not nearly as happy with half-day classes. They tend to see it as an interruption of the student's academic studies.

3. Withdrawal Classes with Itinerant Teachers. In some areas such as the prairie provinces, the immigrant children are spread out thinly across the school districts, making it difficult to gather them all together in one place and so the teacher travels from school to school, withdrawing students for varying periods of time. Some teachers serve as few as three schools a week, while others rush between thirteen, no mean feat when one considers temperatures of often -50°c, howling winds, and icy streets!

4. Withdrawal Classes - School Based Teachers. The alternative to itinerant teachers is to have the children travel to a central location to meet the teacher. Sometimes the children are transferred to the teacher's school until they have mastered English; sometimes they ride the buses perhaps three times a week from their own school to the teacher's school.

5. Total Integration. Some school districts in Canada, particularly those in Maritimes, receive so few immigrant children that a special program is not feasible. The child is therefore placed in a regular class and given whatever help the teacher can provide. Unfortunately there are still quite a few administrators who despite evidence to the contrary follow "do nothing the problem will disappear in time" approach.

Ashworth points out that one of the weakness of most language training programs lies in the second phase of language learning. Once the student has mastered basic English and is enrolled in regular classes, there is seldom anything more than occasional help available to him. Despite the well documented fact that language is far too intricate a system for learner to master all its complexities in one year, and that is standard time a child is expected to spend in a New Canadian class. Problems of second-phase language learning are very acute in districts which have a high entry of students from Hong Kong at the Senior High School level. In 1972 nearly 3,000 students entered Canada from Hong Kong to attend high school.

b) Retention of Language and Cultural Heritage

The Multiculturalism Branch of the Department of Secretary of State provides grants for many groups wishing to maintain supplementary ethnic classes

(language and culture of ethnic groups would be taught here) or for support of other cultural activities such as dance music, folk festivals, and so on. An attempt has been made by several school boards to have a language maintenance program. Toronto, for example, offers German, Italian, Chinese, Hebrew, Polish, Portugese, Russian, Spanish, Ukranian, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian and Croatian in one or more of its schools. But much more exciting are the experiments currently being conducted in Toronto in bilingual and bicultural education. Let me describe two of them:

1. The Chinese-Canadian Bi-cultural Program. In two mid-term Toronto public schools 90% of children are of Chinese origin. In the early 1970's parents of these children began speaking out on the communication gap widening between them and their children -the children were more and more talking in English and becoming part of a new culture that seemed to be rejecting the older culture of their parents. There were after-school chinese classes in the community but they made much extra work for the children and were too expensive for most families. The parents petitioned the school board and after much discussion the program begun in both schools in September 1974. The program has two coordinators, one community worker and three teachers. The students are withdrawn from regular classes for half an hour a day for instruction in Chinese language and culture. The Board's document outlining the rationale for the bicultural program states

> "The existence of such a program in the school would place a recognition of integrity and worth of the Chinese culture within the child's frame of reference. Secondly it would represent compatibility between the home and school rather than a cultural competition for the children's allegeance."

In the first year 300 students, including a few not of Chinese back-

ground enrolled in the programs. This number represents about 2/3rds of all the children in the two schools in question. The program was evaluated a year after its inauguration. The researchers found that most students, parents and teachers agreed that Chinese program was successful in making students more aware of Chinese culture. The students' self concept improved and their academic achievement did not suffer. A similar Greek bilingual program is being run in two schools in East Toronto.

2. The Station Transition Program.

In 1973 an experimental Italian transition program was started in a junior and senior kindergarten. In this program the teacher speaks mainly Italian to children, then English is introduced gradually until by the third year of the school the students are ready to enter a regular program where they begin to read and write in English. But does this not mean that children will be deficient in English? No, say Mary Parbhoo and Stan Shapson, two psychologists who evaluated the program. The children did not suffer either academically or in English language comprehension. Their self concept improved. Their classroom behaviour was similar to that shown by other kindergarten children. The class was fun to be with - the researchers remarked.

Through programs of this nature "culture conflict" so often talked about in relation to education of immigrant children would no longer be a problem. The difference in cultural backgrounds would become an asset rather than a hinderance.

Equality of Cultural Status

The third objective of giving equal status to all cultures remains much

more elusive. It requires a general acceptance of the concept of Multiculturalism by both the ethnic groups and the population at large. To assess the nation's mood on the subject the federal government commissioned two studies. The first was designed to answer the question "Do the various ethnic groups in Canada wish to retain their culture, language and a distinctive lifestyle in a mosaic? Because if they don't the government is barking up the wrong tree. The study conducted by Ken O'Bryen and his colleagues found that although there were large variations among the various ethnic groups, most groups wish to retain their language and culture. They want a multicultural Canada. The second study conducted by Dr. Berry and his colleagues was designed to answer the question whether Canadians of British and French origin who comprise roughly 75% of Canada's population think of the policy of multiculturalism. The results indicate that, on the whole, Canadians would accept immigrants of all races and nationalities. There was little evidence of gross bigotry. However, most Canadians were found to have little knowledge of the multiculturalism policy of their governments but were mildly enthusiastic about the idea. The authors conclude that, on the whole, the Canadian core is more tolerant than the core in most other multiracial societies and is relacively open to the concept of multiculturalism. Dr. Berry and his colleagues had used a national sample. We get a different picture from studies done in high-immigrant areas. Richmond (1970) reported that blacks and Asians were 4 times more likely than whites to report employment discrimination and 8 times more likely to report discrimination on housing. Ramcharan, (1970) reported that 58% of the West Indians claimed to have encountered employment discrimination; 37% in housing and 16% in other areas. Head's study of black community in

Toronto showed that 59% of the Blacks reported some form of discrimination. Recently the Ontario Human Rights Commission Report notes that in 1976-77 "race related complaints made up 58% of the commission's work load". The number of reported incidents of racial violence in public places such as subways, parking lots, on the street and so on have increased dramatically and these have led to the creation of Metro Toronto's task force on Race Relations. Additional evidence of both prejudice and discrimination of both the violent and subtle variety have been reported in briefs such as Ubale Report submitted to Human Rights Commission by the various ethnic groups.

Social climate in the community is reflected in the social climate inside the school. If the situation in high immigrant areas such as Toronto is indeed as bad as the studies would suggest, there is little chance of the immigrant child developing a positive self concept of his ethnic group membership. The school boards have attempted to remedy this mainly through providing information for students, and in-service training for teachers. Toronto Board of Education, for example, has developed multi-media packages on Greece, Italy, the West Indies and so on for use with teachers PTAs and students. These packages provide information on the cultural backgrounds of the various groups. At least four Canadian universities now offer programs in Multicultural studies and more are likely to follow suit.

As far as education of immigrants is concerned we in Canada face two major problems. Firstly there is a great lack of sound empirically based research. Much of our knowledge comes either from chance remarks of parents, teachers, principals, students, administrators and the like, or from anecdotal accounts published in the news media. Good studies are few and far between.

Secondly, in common with other multiracial and multicultural societies, we have not yet learnt how to avoid intergroup conflict and particularly prejudice and discrimination against the visible minorities.

So where do we stand?

I feel that Multiculturalism, the current official policy, is an exciting theoretical concept. Whether it can work in practice, the jury is still out. After all is said and done Anglo-Saxons still control all the levers of power in Canada and until every child in school has an equal opportunity to put his hands on those levers of power Multiculturalism is likely to remain but an empty slogan.